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EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS BY NICOLAS ROERICH

"Little knowledge brings dusk with it; great knowledge brings light. Spurious art brings the commonplace; genuine art creates joy of spirit and that power on which the building of our future rests." Thus Nicolas Roerich speaks of art in general, and in a peculiar sense his words are applicable to his own work and to the particular group of paintings which are shown in the Museum from March twenty-fifth until about April twentieth.

Nicolas Roerich is a Northern Slav. Born in Petrograd, as a boy he spent much of his life at his father's country place, an estate of ten thousand acres with innumerable lakes, primeval forests, and great tumuli covering the remains of the earliest inhabitants of Russia. In secret,—for it was against the law,—he excavated many of these mounds, laid bare the tombs of ancient chieftains, finding stone tools, iron and bronze implements of war, and many another relic of the past. This influenced Roerich profoundly, and when his education in university and art school was finished, the love of Russia and the re-creation of her historic past became one of his greatest obsessions.

With the opening of the war Roerich was in Petrograd. At the time of the Revolution he fled to Finland, refusing to have anything to do with the Bolshevik regime. There in Finland, and later in London, he painted the majority of pieces which are included in this exhibition. They are the expression of a personality unique in art, and essentially an expression of his race. Although in 1900 he had spent a student year in Paris, he came back to his native land only more deeply rooted in its traditions and more than ever an individualist.

If you will, Roerich's art is modernistic in its bold pattern and the elimination of unessentials, but it is in color that it makes the greatest appeal. Scarcely ever have such marvelous groupings and arrangements of color been laid upon canvas as by this mystic painter of North Russia.

Several years ago Gallery IX was filled with a remarkable exhibition by Boris Anisfeld, also a Russian, but a Russian of the South with the passionate and sensuous imagery of the southern Slav. Quite different from him is Roerich, who has

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imbibed from his ancestors and the studies of his youth the spirit of the provinces along the Baltic Sea. Different in spirit as they may be, both men are united in one fact. Both belong to the great Russian decorative movement which numbers Bakst and Benois, as well, among its members.

Among the paintings exhibited are many landscapes painted in the province of Karelia and along the shores of Lake Ladoga, studies for stage decorations for Prince Igor, scenes for the Pushkin-Rimsky-Korsakov opera, Tsar Saltan, for Snegourotchka, produced by the Chicago Opera, and studies for a variety of other operatic productions. In addition, there are strange reconstructions of ancient Russia and prophetic paintings such as The Last Angel, who rides triumphant in the clouds above the roaring flames of countryside and city.

Whatever may be thought of Roerich and of his paintings, it is impossible to escape the power of their color and strange imagery. They are intensely vital, intensely personal expressions of a subtle and visionary temperament. And, finally, they are essentially Russian.

W. M. M.

JOHN BENSON

For six and a half years the Museum has had no more faithful and interested worker than John Benson, who, after some months of ill health, died on March nineteenth. His museum experience began at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, from which training he came to us as head utility man in 1915. His unfailing good nature, his earnest interest in his work, his pleasure in the ever new beauty of the Museum, and our knowledge of his entire faithfulness and devotion made him one to be missed in any group where such qualities are valued.

F. A. W.

CHANGE IN STAFF

Miss Dorothy Blair, for five years the capable Secretary to the Director, has accepted a position as a curatorial assistant at The Art Institute of Chicago. Her place will be filled by Miss Ethel F. Cook, who has been preparing for the work since Miss Blair decided several months ago that she must find something nearer her home. Miss Blair carries with her the cordial good wishes of the staff.

F. A. W.